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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

April 6, 1982

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Dear Senator Moynihan:

Your letter of March 15, 1982, which forwarded a letter from Mark Dedman of February 12, 1982, concerning chemical warfare in Laos, was forwarded by the Department of Defense to this office for response.

The U.S. Government, including the Department of State, has long been deeply concerned over the disturbing reports of chemical warfare in Laos (as well as in other countries) and has actively demonstrated its concern through various fora.

-- Beginning in 1978, as a result of the alarming increase in refugee reports on the use of chemical weapons in Laos, the U.S. State Department on numerous occasions has raised the matter with the Government of Laos and has proposed to the Lao Government that it accede to the 1925 Geneva "protocol for the prohibition of the use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of bacteriological methods of warfare."

-- In mid-1980, we initiated consultations on the problem with our allies and key neutral countries. With their support we then expanded consultations and began to stimulate broad international attention to the issue. Under Western leadership and over the concerted opposition of the USSR, Vietnam and other communist states, the United Nations General Assembly in December 1980 overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling on the UN Secretary General, with the assistance of medical and technical experts, to carry out an impartial investigation of the reports of chemical weapons use. The Secretary-General appointed a group of experts to undertake an investigation. The commission has held several sessions thus far to examine the available evidence, in November 1981 extended its investigations to the Lao and Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand, and reported on the results of the investigations at the UN General Assembly last fall. The UN General Assembly voted on December 4, 1981 to extend its mandate for another year to enable it to carry out additional investigations.

-- The U.S. is cooperating fully with the UN investigation and has already submitted a large volume of information to the Secretary General, including unclassified reports and declassified intelligence information pertaining to the

The Honorable
Daniel Patrick Moynihan,
United States Senate.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY T. Hearn DATE 8/31/82

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reported use of chemical weapons in Laos, and covering the period from 1975 to the present. We also provided the transcripts of the open Congressional hearings, which were held on this subject in December 1979 and April 1980, and the texts of H. Res. 512 "condemning the use of chemical agents...as violating the spirit of international law and morality." Open hearings were also held in November 1981 and March 1982. We will continue to support and assist this UN investigation.

-- The U.S. Government is making a concerted effort to develop information/evidence on reports of chemical warfare in the field. Our Embassies in Bangkok and Vientiane have been particularly active in this regard since the reports first appeared and continue to interview and examine people who may have been chemical warfare victims. In addition, since 1979 the U.S. Government has dispatched three teams to Thailand from Washington specifically to interview refugees and investigate the reports.

We have recently uncovered significant physical evidence that rather than a traditional lethal chemical agent, abnormally high levels of highly lethal poisons known as mycotoxins have been used in Southeast Asia. We are taking steps to ensure that this evidence is widely available, including passing it to the UN committee of experts. Our objective is to stop the attacks of chemical and/or biological agents as soon as possible.

The possible use of lethal chemical weapons in Laos or elsewhere should be and is an international concern. The U.S. Government, of course, gives high priority to these investigations, and is continuing to gather information for submission to the international commission.

I am enclosing a recent State Department report on the use of chemical weapons in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan. The author of the October 1980 "Reader's Digest" article, Ms. Hamilton-Merritt, also wrote a follow-up article on this subject in the August 1981 issue of "The Reader's Digest."

The continued interest and concern about this issue which you have expressed is appreciated. I hope this letter puts our views and actions on this important matter in better perspective.

Sincerely,

Powell A. Moore
Assistant Secretary for
Congressional Relations

Enclosures:
1. Correspondence Returned
2. Chemical Warfare Report

Letter to Senator Moynihan

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